

Dispersion by time-varying atmospheric boundary layers

Submitted by

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Alexander Charles Taylor

Abstract

The periods of time-varying turbulence in the atmospheric boundary layer, i.e. the morning and evening transitions, are often overlooked or highly idealised by dispersion models. These transitions make up a significant portion of the diurnal cycle and are known to affect the spread of pollution due to the properties of turbulence in the residual and stable layers, resulting in phenomena such as lofting, trapping, and fumigation.

Two main simulation techniques are presented for the purpose of modelling the dispersion of passive tracers in both convective and evening transitional boundary layers: Lagrangian stochastic (LS) modelling for 1D, inhomogeneous, non-stationary turbulence; and large-eddy simulation (LES) with a particle model tracing pollutant paths using a combination of the resolved flow velocities and a random displacement model to represent sub-grid scale motions.

In the convective boundary layer, LS models more accurately representing the state of turbulence, and including the effect of skewness, are shown to produce dispersion results in closer agreement with LES. By considering individual particle trajectories, a reflective top boundary in LS models is shown to produce un-physical, sharp changes in velocity and position. By applying a correction to the vertical velocity variance based on representing the stable potential temperature gradient above the boundary layer, particles are contained within the boundary layer in a physically accurate way.

An LS model for predicting dispersion in time-varying, skewed turbulence is developed and tested for various particle releases in transitional boundary layers with different rates of decay, showing an improvement in accuracy compared with previous LS models. Further improvement is made by applying a correction to the vertical velocity variance to represent the effect of a positive potential temperature gradient developing over the course of the transition. Finally, a developing stable boundary layer is shown to have a significant trapping effect on particles released near the surface.

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Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Contents	4
List of figures	7
List of tables	13
1 Introduction	14
1.1 The atmospheric boundary layer	16
1.1.1 The boundary-layer evening transition	16
1.1.2 Dispersion processes	17
1.2 The ABL and turbulent diffusion	20
1.2.1 Observations	20
1.2.2 Experimental approaches	21
1.2.3 Modelling approaches	23
1.3 Research objectives	27
1.4 Thesis outline	28
2 Lagrangian stochastic dispersion models	31
2.1 Introduction	31
2.2 Lagrangian modelling studies	32
2.3 Formulating the LSM	35
2.3.1 The well-mixed criterion	42
2.4 An LS model including skewness	43

2.5	Time-varying skewed turbulence	51
2.6	Summary	54
3	Dispersion by large-eddy simulations	55
3.1	Introduction	55
3.2	A brief history of LES	58
3.2.1	Studies into LES dispersion modelling	59
3.2.2	LES of a CBL decay	60
3.3	Overview of the Large-Eddy Model	61
3.3.1	Resolved model	61
3.3.2	Sub-grid model	63
3.3.3	Numerical implementation	64
3.4	LES particle model	65
3.5	Summary	72
4	Investigating skewness in the convective boundary layer	73
4.1	Dispersion by large-eddy simulation	75
4.1.1	Initialising LES of the CBL	76
4.1.2	LES particle tracking	80
4.2	Lagrangian stochastic modelling	86
4.3	Comparison of particle modelling by large-eddy and LS methods . .	92
4.3.1	Representing the turbulence	96
4.3.2	The effect of skewness in the CBL	99
4.3.3	Treatment of the upper boundary	102
4.4	Summary	108
5	Dispersion in decaying turbulence	109
5.1	Evening transition LES studies	111
5.2	Evening transition dispersion modelling	113
5.3	Large-eddy simulation of decaying convective turbulence	116
5.3.1	Modelling particles with LES in the decaying convective boundary-layer	122

5.4	LS modelling of a decaying convective boundary layer	126
5.4.1	The effect of stability on LS modelling	134
5.4.2	LS decay modelling using parameterized profiles	139
5.5	Sensitivity to the rate of decay of surface heat flux	147
5.5.1	LS modelling of the gradual decay	152
5.5.2	Stability in a gradual transition	155
5.5.3	Modelling a gradual decay using parameterized profiles . . .	157
5.6	Discussion	161
6	Modelling an observed evening transition	164
6.1	Driving LES with observed surface heat flux	164
6.2	LES of a full evening transition	165
6.2.1	Particle dispersion in a full transition using LES	171
6.3	Particle dispersion in a full transition using LS Models	176
6.4	Summary	179
7	Summary and further discussion	181
7.1	Future work	187

List of figures

1.1	Visual representation of different plume behaviours that occur in the ABL, based on figure 2.4 of Bach (1972).	19
1.2	Diagram showing the Gaussian simulation method for buoyant plumes (Beychok, 2005).	24
1.3	Diagram showing the Lagrangian stochastic particle simulation method.	26
2.1	Particle concentration profiles before and after 10,000 time-steps of the LS dispersion model described by equation (2.30).	43
2.2	x - z cross section of vertical velocities in a large-eddy simulation of a typical daytime CBL.	44
2.3	A skewed distribution calculated as the weighted sum of two Gaussian distributions.	45
2.4	Numerical implementation of the reflection boundary condition for Lagrangian stochastic simulation of particles in skewed turbulence. .	51
2.5	Particle concentration profile after 10,000 time-steps of the skewed LS dispersion model described by equation (2.67).	52
3.1	A typical energy spectrum of the CBL showing the range of LES, DNS, and RANS.	57
3.2	Ratio of sub-grid scale TKE to resolved TKE for a typical CBL generated using LES.	58
3.3	Visualisation of the computational grid used in the LEM: Arikawa-C in the horizontal and Lorenz in the vertical.	65

3.4	Representation of a cube of grid points in the LEM to show how trilinear interpolation of flow velocity (3.15) is calculated.	69
4.1	Depth of the CBL generated by large-eddy simulation from the time of particle release. Diagnosed by the height of minimum heat flux. .	78
4.2	Vertical profiles of CBL properties produced using large-eddy simulation.	79
4.3	The height of an individual particle in the CBL tracked over time. Path generated using the CBL1 large-eddy simulation.	82
4.4	Mean plume heights ± 1 standard deviation for a range of release heights. Paths simulated using the CBL1 large-eddy simulation. . .	83
4.5	Instantaneous particle concentration over the depth of the boundary layer for a release height of $z/z_i = 0.067$ at various times after release. Generated using the CBL1 large-eddy simulation.	86
4.6	Idealised profiles of σ_w^2 and dissipation of ε turbulent kinetic energy as described by equations (4.3) and (4.4) respectively.	88
4.7	Mean plume heights (solid) ± 1 standard deviation for a range of release heights. Paths simulated using LSM-Param with parameterized σ_w^2 and ε	90
4.8	Instantaneous particle concentration over the depth of the boundary layer for a release height of $z/z_i = 0.067$ at various times after release, generated using LSM-Param.	91
4.9	A comparison of instantaneous particle concentration over the depth of the boundary layer at various times after release, generated using LSM-Param and LES.	93
4.10	A comparison showing the paths of two initially close particles simulated using LSM-Param and LES.	95
4.11	A comparison of the vertical profiles of σ_w^2 and ε used by Weil (1990), against those generated using the CBL1 large-eddy simulation. . . .	96
4.12	Comparison of mean plume heights for various release heights in the CBL, generated by LSM-Param, LSM-LES and LES.	98

4.13	Vertical profile of the third moment of vertical velocity calculated using a horizontal area average from the CBL1 large-eddy simulation.	100
4.14	Comparison of mean plume heights in the CBL generated by: LS model not representing skewness (eq. (2.30)); Hudson and Thomson (1994) LS model including representation of CBL skewness (eq. (2.69)); and the CBL1 large-eddy simulation.	101
4.15	Single particle paths in the CBL generated using the LSM-LES and the CBL1 large-eddy simulation.	103
4.16	Vertical velocity variance profile generated by the CBL1 large-eddy simulation and modified according to equation (4.5).	105
4.17	Single particle paths in the CBL generated by: LSM-LES including skewness and using the modified σ_w^2 profile as shown in figure 4.16, and the CBL1 large-eddy simulation.	106
4.18	Comparison of mean plume heights in the CBL generated by: LSM-LES with modified σ_w^2 profile and skewness; LSM-LES with skewness; and the CBL1 large-eddy simulation.	107
5.1	Diagram showing the possible sensitivity of plume dispersion to release time during the evening transition.	110
5.2	Surface heat flux over time as imposed by Nieuwstadt and Brost (1986) and Sorbjan (1997).	112
5.3	The diffusivity profile of Carvalho et al. (2010) at $t = 1$ hour, given by equation (5.2).	114
5.4	Vertical profiles of potential temperature and heat flux throughout the transition. Profiles generated using the Decay1 large-eddy simulation.	117
5.5	Vertical profiles of potential temperature compared with the BLLAST field observations data. Profiles generated using the Decay1 large-eddy simulation.	118

5.6	Total (resolved+sub-grid) vertical velocity variance, dissipation of TKE and vertical velocity skewness at times throughout the transition. Profiles generated using the Decay1 large-eddy simulation. . .	119
5.7	Volume average of σ_w^2 and σ_u^2 at non-dimensionalised times. Calculated using the Decay1 large-eddy simulation.	120
5.8	Vertical velocity in the $x - z$ plane prior to the switch-off of surface heat flux, and 3600 s after. Generated using the Decay1 large-eddy simulation.	122
5.9	Simulated path of a single particle released 1200 seconds before the switch-off of surface heat flux. Path produced using the Decay1 large-eddy simulation.	123
5.10	Mean plume heights plus and minus 1 standard deviation for low, mid, and high releases. Simulated using the Decay1 LES.	124
5.11	Particle concentration from a near surface release before and after the switch-off of surface heat flux. Paths produced using the Decay1 large-eddy simulation.	126
5.12	Vertical concentration profile of 50,000 particles before and after a 10,000 second simulation using the LS model LSM-LES _{non-t-vary+skew} . . .	129
5.13	Vertical concentration profile of 50,000 particles before and after a 10,000 second simulation using the LS model LSM-LES _{t-vary+skew} . . .	130
5.14	Volume averaged vertical velocity variance over the duration of the boundary-layer transition.	131
5.15	A comparison of mean plume heights in the NB86 evening transition, generated using LSM and LES at various release heights and times. . .	133
5.16	Idealised energy spectrum of a stably stratified layer supporting the existence of both turbulent and non-turbulent motions.	136
5.17	A comparison of mean plume heights in the NB86 evening transition, generated using LSM and LES at various heights and times.	138
5.18	Volume average dissipation for large-eddy simulations using the NB86 surface heating for a range of wind speeds.	141

5.19	Volume average third moment of vertical velocity variance over the duration of a NB86 transition.	142
5.20	Volume averages of σ_w^2 , ε and $\overline{w^3}$ over the duration of a NB86 transition. Generated using the Decay1 large-eddy simulation and parameterizations.	144
5.21	A comparison of mean plume heights in the NB86 evening transition, generated using LSM and LES at various heights and times.	145
5.22	Prescribed heat flux for the LES based on that of Sorbjan (1997).	148
5.23	Vertical profiles of potential temperature and heat flux throughout the transition. Profiles generated using the Sorb1 large-eddy simulation.	149
5.24	A comparison of volume averaged σ_w^2 and ε in the cases of rapid and slow transition.	150
5.25	Volume averaged σ_w^2 over the duration of the rapid and slow boundary-layer transitions.	151
5.26	Mean plume heights plus and minus 1 standard deviation for low (blue), mid (red), and high (green) releases simulated by the Sorb1 LES.	152
5.27	A comparison of mean plume heights in the Sorbjan (1997) evening transition, generated using LSM and LES at various heights and times.	154
5.28	A comparison of mean plume heights in the Sorbjan (1997) evening transition, generated using LSM and LES at various heights and times.	156
5.29	Volume averages of σ_w^2 , ε and $\overline{w^3}$ over the duration of a Sorbjan (1997) gradual transition. Generated using the Sorb1 large-eddy simulation and parameterizations.	159
5.30	A comparison of mean plume heights in the Sorbjan (1997) evening transition, generated using LSM and LES at various heights and times.	160
6.1	Surface heat flux over time from the Cardington site for the evening of September the 23rd, 2003.	166
6.2	LES domain decomposition for parallel processing.	167

6.3	Vertical velocity in the $x - z$ plane for large positive surface heat flux and negative surface heat flux.	168
6.4	Vertical profiles of potential temperature, potential temperature, wind speed, and vertical velocity variance and various times throughout the observed boundary layer transition.	170
6.5	Particle release times relative to the evolution of surface heat flux and the volume averaged vertical velocity variance over time.	173
6.6	Volume averaged σ_w^2 for the instantaneous switch off of surface heat flux, the gradual decay, and the observed decay.	174
6.7	LES of mean plume height plus and minus one standard deviation for particle releases in a transition forced by observed surface heat flux.	175
6.8	Mean plume heights plus and minus one standard deviation for particle releases in a transition forced by observed surface heat flux. Generated by LES, LSM-LES _{t-vary+skew} , and LSM-LES _{t-vary+skew+σ-mod} with modified variance profile.	177
6.9	Mean plume heights plus and minus one standard deviation for particle releases in a transition forced by observed surface heat flux. Generated by LES, LSM-LES _{t-vary+skew} , and LSM-LES _{t-vary+skew+σ-mod} with modified variance profile.	179

List of tables

3.1	Definition of the variables used in the LEM equation set (3.1), (3.2), and (3.3).	62
5.1	Flow variables of our large-eddy simulation compared to those of Nieuwstadt and Brost (1986).	116
5.2	A reference for the properties and plot style of the models employed in Chapter 5.	128